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LETTER

OF

MR. SIMS, OF SOUTH CAROLINA,

TO

HIS CONSTITUENTS.

Towers, printer, Washington.

LETTER.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, June 26, 1848. }

FELLOW-CITIZENS: When, some months since, I indicated an intention to address a letter to you, on the subject of "Affairs at Washington," I anticipated a much earlier execution of that intention than the progress of events, and a proper regard to the object proposed in the performance, have since seemed to justify. Delay has been unavoidable, unless I could have consented to substitute conjectural opinions, for satisfactory information on several questions, in the solution of which, I knew you could but feel a lively interest. The final close of the war was expected by the ratification of a treaty of peace. The event, however, lingered, but I chose to wait the result, before I communicated with you. I trust, that your view of the matter will accord with mine, and excuse the delay.

You were pleased to call me into your service at a most remarkable point of time; in fact, at the beginning of a new era in our history. All the great issues, which had divided the country for years, in regard to our domestic or foreign policy, had, under the temporizing, and, in some cases, conflicting expedients of former administrations, been brought to that point, which required firm and decisive action, when the present Chief Magistrate came into office. The adjustment of the Tariff, on proper principles; the establishment of an independent agency of the Government—free from bank connection—for the safe and wholesome management of our revenues; the settlement of the vexed question of Internal Improvements, by the General Government; the controversy between the United States and Great Britain, in relation to the respective claims of the two Governments in Oregon; and the difficulties subsisting between the United States and Mexico, complicated with the annexation of Texas, were questions no longer to be evaded, or left unadjusted. The whole country, as you may well remember, looked to the meeting, and marked the progress of business, of the twenty-ninth Congress, with the deepest solicitude. All these grave questions were pending and pressing, in the solution of which were involved its most vital inter-

ests. Just at this period in the state of public affairs, I came into Congress; and it has been my fortune, therefore, to participate in the deliberations and decisions on all these questions. I am happy to say that, by a wise and firm course in the Government, they have all been adjusted, and, I hope, finally. Of the action of Congress on all of them, and the adjustment of all, except our controversy with Mexico, you have already been fully informed. The restoration of peace, by the treaty recently ratified by the Mexican Congress, adjusts this also. I rejoice that peace is restored, and upon terms highly honorable and satisfactory to the country. But for the unfortunate divisions at home among our politicians, that result must have much sooner occurred. A vigorous prosecution of the war, for those just objects, at all times avowed by the Executive, it was manifest, to all reflecting and unprejudiced men, was the only way to arrive at any early and honorable peace.

It is pleasing to reflect on the condition of the country, at the close of an expensive and distant foreign war, under the operation of the policy of the Government. The general prosperity, the public credit, and the national character, were never better; in fact, were never equal to their present elevated position. All the great interests, in every section, are reasonably flourishing, some, no doubt, more so than others. The cotton-planting interest is, probably, owing to causes mostly to be found in the disturbed state of Europe, and the consequent embarrassment in its monetary affairs, the least prosperous. The public credit has been admirably sustained, and is, at this moment, most flatteringly good, notwithstanding the heavy expenditures necessarily incident to the prosecution of the war. The late loan of sixteen millions of dollars is a proud illustration of the state of our public credit. The whole amount was readily taken, at a premium of more than three per cent.; and, at no time during the progress of the war, did the public stocks of any kind fall below par, except by a mere shade for a few days. At this time Treasury notes are at a premium of from three to four dollars on the hundred. What an admirable contrast to the condition of our finances and credit during the wars of 1812 and the Revolution! This result, I trace, in a great degree, to the policy of our Government, under the present Administration. The national character, too, is much exalted. The evils of the war, now just closed, if possible, consistently with the national honor and safety, should and would have been avoided. They are

admitted to be great. Much treasure has been expended, and many lives unhappily sacrificed. But these evils are not without considerations of mitigation. We have acquired much renown in arms, exhibited the entire futility of the opinion that large standing armies are necessary for the prompt and efficient prosecution of war, illustrated the character and efficiency of our citizen-soldiery, and have forced other nations to feel and own our true position and importance in the civilized world. The state of the public credit, as above exhibited, beautifully illustrates the high estimation in which both our institutions and their stability are held, at home and abroad. Capitalists in Europe, as well as in the United States, eagerly sought investments in the Government loan. The state of public credit is generally an index of both the prosperity and national character of a country.

While the state of affairs is such in our own country, which has gradually, in the period of the last three years, been attained, Europe presents a very different picture. Since the fall of Napoleon, an uninterrupted peace, with the exception of an occasional outbreak, resulting in internal revolutions in some few of the nations, had prevailed in Europe until recently. It was generally anticipated, that the death of Louis Philippe, of France, would mark the commencement of new and general disturbances. This result has, it would seem, anticipated the general expectation. Italy, France, Austria, Germany, and even England and Russia, are all heaving with the popular impulse, which a better knowledge of the People's rights, and a clearer sense of the unjust operation of the system of Government under which the masses in those countries have been living, have awakened and energized. What practical results may ultimately arise out of these commotions, may not well be foreseen. It is to be hoped that a greater approach to popular rights may be attained in the reconstruction or reformation of the respective Governments. In the meantime, public credit and confidence in the stability of Government have been much impaired.

In this condition of things, it is altogether fortunate that our country is restored to a state of peace with all nations, possessed of a high national character sufficient to shield us from insult, or the dangers of those annoyances to which we were subjected on the high seas, during the disturbances which grew out of the French revolution at the close of the last century. Our war with Mexico, in having afforded

occasion to unfold to the world our prowess, and thus exalt the national character, will no doubt be the means of preserving peace hereafter. It will be much regretted, if the necessary and proper reforms in Europe, may be attainable only through the troubles and evils of war, either general, or civil; but should such be the result, the great importance of peace in fostering our interests, in such an event, must be obvious to all; which, added to the general and great considerations at all times, demonstrative of a pacific system of policy will unquestionably lead our Government and people to pursue such a policy.

The great length of the session of Congress is, no doubt, a topic on which you feel some curiosity to hear explanations. Is this great length, into which the first sessions of Congress have of late run, necessary for the proper transaction of the public business? I honestly think not. Too much latitude in debate is authorized under the rules of proceeding in the House. Instead of discussing the business properly under consideration the speakers are permitted to wander into the boundless field of political and party debate. Some pertinence ought to be required; if it were, the business would be better considered, and much time economized. The Senate is no less exposed to these unnecessary delays, and from similar causes, than the House. In both bodies, party scrambles are too much mixed up with public business, to the great delay of the latter. I make no charge against individuals; the evil is in the rules and practice under them, in Congress. The war with Mexico and its conclusion, made the present session unavoidably long, and may yet protract it some time.

Among the subjects discussed, often irrelevantly, in which you may feel an interest, are the powers of Congress over the subject of slavery in the Territories belonging to the United States; and the Presidential election. The former subject will probably be practically disposed of before the close of the present session; most certainly it will, if our duties to the people in the Territories shall be suffered to have their proper influence on our action, and if a wise promptitude and firmness to meet and dispose of dangerous and inevitable questions shall be exhibited in our statesmanship. Delays are dangerous in most matters, but peculiarly so in exciting and angry questions. How this matter will ultimately be settled, the brief period in which exact information will be attained, makes it useless for me now to

conjecture. I trust that it will be in conformity with justice to all sections of the country, and on such terms as will restore harmony and a proper spirit of confraternity throughout the Union. I know that there are wreckless, impulsive men capable of sacrificing our glorious institutions and wise system of Government, upon this or almost any other question, were they able. They, in soul, dislike the Union. Such men will always mischievously and industriously strive to aggravate all questions and controversies of a sectional character in order to reach their wicked purpose. It was against such, that Gen. Washington so wisely and solemnly warned us. They are, however, few in number, and I have confidence in the people and in Providence, to control the prejudices and selfishness of such, for the preservation and perpetuity of our Government and Union.

The latter question is one peculiarly for the people of the several States; it is, nevertheless, much discussed here. I think members of Congress, as such, ought to have little agency in making nominations for the high Executive office of the country, and should only interfere in the canvass, as other citizens. Congressional efforts to elevate particular individuals to that office, if not inspired by the hope, too often result in the fact, of Executive rewards after the election. Such a system is dangerous to the independence of the Legislative department of the Government, and tends to bring it in subordination to the Executive. Members of Congress ought not to be appointed by the Executive to high offices, as long as the present system is continued.

You have, of course, learned that the Democratic party have nominated Gen. LEWIS CASS, of Michigan, for the office of President, and Gen. WM. O. BUTLER, of Kentucky, for that of Vice-President, at the next election; and that the Whig party have nominated Gen. ZACHARY TAYLOR, of the United States Army, and MILLARD FILLMORE, of New York, respectively, for the same offices. Since these nominations were made, the Wilmot Proviso portion of the Democratic party, of New York, have nominated Mr. VAN BUREN for their candidate. Of this last candidate and many of his adherents, I need only say, that he and they have libelled his and their whole past lives. His election is altogether out of the question. He is a mere neighborhood candidate, sectional and unconstitutional in his views.

I have not space to discuss the Presidential election in this letter. I have decided opinions on all the great questions before the country and Congress—on this, equally so. Not to have, would involve me

in an entire change of my political principles. I hope, in a few weeks, to have an opportunity, if you may so desire, fully to advise with you on this and all other great questions in which you may take an interest, in a more satisfactory manner.

Touching the details of Administration, together with the various matters of revenue, and expenditure, you have received full information in the President's annual message to Congress in December last, and the other various public documents which I have taken pains to circulate among you. As to the mode in which business is transacted in the various Executive departments here, you have frequently heard much, and generally in a tone of censure. I have taken some pains to inform myself on this subject. The business in these departments is vast, in importance and extent, and its performance requires troops of subordinate officers. No doubt inefficient and worthless persons do sometimes get into some of these offices; but I will undertake to say, that the business in the departments and its various offices is industriously and faithfully performed. But I shall tire you. A word more, and you will pardon me, as it relates to myself.

I have now been in your service some time. Public life has ceased, with the loss of its novelty, to have any fascination for me, except as it involves considerations of duty and usefulness. Private life would be much preferred, where I might enjoy the pleasures of home, and the opportunity of giving to my own affairs that attention which they need. I feel, however, that I have no right to withhold my services from you at this time, if you shall choose to continue them. The experience which your kindness and partiality have enabled me to acquire in the conduct of public affairs, qualifies me to serve you with more efficiency than I could hope to do at my first entrance into public life. I, therefore, as I intimated to you during the last fall, before leaving South Carolina for Congress, shall be a candidate for re-election at the ensuing general elections. This announcement, I deem it proper to make, in order to relieve you from any uncertainty in the matter.

With great respect,

I am your obedient servant,

A. D. SIMS.

